

VPW 2020 (Virtual Pilgrim Way)

Basingwerk Abbey to Ynys Enlli

Today (Edit: being in May 2020) would have been the start of the 2020 edition of the annual Pilgrimage along the Pilgrims Way and a special one too as it was to be our 10th anniversary. Unfortunately because of the current lockdown restrictions we're unable to actually walk it this year. However, we thought a virtual one might compensate slightly and to serve as a reminder that it will still be there when all this is over.

Day 1 Basingwerk to Trelawnyd 11.3m (18.2km)

(Edit: Our inaugural pilgrimage in 2011, The Bishop of St Asaph, The Right Reverend Gregory Cameron gave his blessing as we set off from the grounds of Basingwerk Abbey. We certainly had a good turn out that day, so much so that we only walked the first 3.5miles to Pantasaph Priory. Because of the pomp & ceremony of the day, we felt there wouldn't be enough time to walk the full 11 miles. but on the way we enjoyed the views from Pen y ball as well as a visit to St Winefrides Well and of course the Priory with its beautiful garden containing the Stations of the Cross.

But usually this is only the coffee stop as we make our way to the woods at Lloc where we find bluebells in abundance. This part of the walk is new and a better option than walking on the road.

Lunchtime is usually spent at the tower on the hill in Coed y Carreg with views of the Dee Estuary before we descend to see the Celtic Cross at Maen Achwyfan where we pick up a Pilgrims stamp which is located in a bird box at the entrance of the field. (the first stamp would have been at the start).

The beautiful village of Llanasa is our next stop with it's church, pub and pretty houses (and a duck pond). It's getting late in the afternoon and despite the call of the Red Lion, we must walk on to Trelawnyd but if you can manage it, a scamper up Gop hill for some tremendous views along the coast to the Great Orme provides a nice end to the day.

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Day 2 Trelawnyd to St Asaph 9.5m (15.25km)

This being a Sunday we like to finish earlier hence the slightly shorter distance. We meet in the car park next to the village hall in Trelawnyd and make our way down to St Michaels Church across the road where we can pick another stamp up by the pretty lych-gate at the entrance (in a bird box again) (Details of where to find all the stamps on the route are listed on the website.) This is where we 'gee' ourselves up for the day as we set off down the lane and into the fields in the general direction of the A55 which we cross via a bridge I hasten to add at the top of Rhualt Hill. But just before we get there we have our coffee stop at a lovely little area at Glan-Llyn where there is a bench and a pond in a small grove of trees right on the route and you can hardly hear the busy A55 which is only a matter of a few hundred yards away.

Suitably refreshed we tackle the bridge and cross an enormous field which has had various crops over the years including daffodils which were stunning when we've walked it in the past(which is usually in May) This brings us out to an airfield where there is a Spitfire of all things!. Also look out for any Dinosaurs that may be lurking around. Farther up the lanes it gets even more bizarre as we see the Terminator in a garden of modern(?) sculptures(?). Prepare to be amused!! We have been climbing gradually and we top out at possibly our lunch stop at a point above Rhualt Castle the high point of the day. Views from here can be amazing so much so you can see 3 cathedrals, 2 in Liverpool and the one at our destination of the day at St Asaph down in the vale. A few years ago one of our original walkers and good friend to the group had a real struggle with the stile here that's always been a challenge to cross anyway, but Howard made a real meal of it. Howard has since passed away and so we always remember him at this spot and have christened this spot as 'Howard's Stile' even though now it's been replaced by a gate but it always brings a smile to our faces.

Down the hill toward St Buenos Retreat though we don't visit it now as there is no official route through it and we don't like to disturb the ambiance of the place as it is place for reflection, peace and quiet after all. We are now on Offa's Dyke but not for long as we pass the 'Rock Chapel' high up on a rocky outcrop to our right and arrive in Tremeirchion, another beautiful village on our route perched on the side of the Clwydian Hills. We have time out here (possibly a late lunch if the weather was unsuitable at Howard's Stile) in or around the churchyard of Corpus Christi which is another church of historical interest dating from the 1300's. Check out the Stone Cross in the churchyard

The last leg is down into the vale to cross the River Clwyd for our last little uphill where you can look back to the Clwydian hills which on a fine day is a joy to see. The way now brings us out eventually onto the main Denbigh road into St Asaph and a short walk into the cathedral grounds.

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Day 3 St Asaph to Llansannan 10.5m (17.25Km)

It's always special starting at the cathedral St. Asaph as it really gives a sense of occasion and especially on a usually subdued Monday after the initial excitement of the weekend. There's usually a drop off in numbers but that does not deter the willing to step out down the hill to the parish church at the bottom next to the bridge over the Elwy which we will be crossing again later.

Unfortunately the first 3 miles or so are on tarmac but once you get off the busy road in St. Asaph it's gentle lane walking to Cefn Meiriadog and St. Mary's church and our coffee stop. The location of this 19th century church is beautiful and the views back to the cathedral, the Clwydian Hills and the sea give you a feeling of serenity. It's a short hop to our next point of interest where we cross the river Elwy again at Bont Newydd before we have to climb out of the valley and off the lanes through a wood and into a field that can be full of cows but there is a way round the edge of the field. One year we encountered so many cows in this field but with bulls too and they were making such a commotion until we realised that we had a couple of dogs with us and they were reacting to them. Thankfully the cattle were behind an electric fence. We now make sure that any dogs with us are under control.

After this and a few more fields, lanes etc we emerge at a crossroads near to Llanefyd where there is a very convenient Bus shelter (shelter being the operative word especially if the weather is inclement) where it seems to be midday! We always make ourselves very comfortable at this spot. From here Llanefydd is a short walk up the lane to gather a stamp if required, but the actual route skirts the village to go high across the fields from one valley to the next taking in some fabulous views to the mountains of Snowdonia. It's always encouraging to see the changing scenery like this and gives you a lift through this quite challenging terrain.

Dropping down to the bridge over the river Aled we walk along the river to the small hamlet of a big sounding Bryn Rhyd yr Arian where we have to take a break because some of us are now flagging and because it's such a lovely place to stop next to the river with a couple of bridges and a nice table and bench to rest our weary selves. But it's not far now to the end and we continue to follow the river into Llansannan. Fortunately it can be a relaxing end as the woods we walk through are full of bluebells, wild garlic and other flora to take your mind off other things. But it's so nice to walk into Llansannan and see the Red Lion Pub and the journey's end.

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Day 4. Llansannan to Llangernyw. 13.5m (21.5km)

Yes, I'm afraid this is the longest day of the Pilgrimage, but it can also be the most rewarding. One of our walkers last year, who was doing it for the first time, remarked that was the best day's walk he's ever done and the peace & tranquility he got from the views & ambiance of the day will live on with him forever! Well isn't that what this pilgrimage is all about. The route today is also the one that meanders the most as we take in the remote village of Gwytherin, the source of the river Elwy and the village where St. Winefride was an abbess at the Abbey. Unfortunately the abbey doesn't exist anymore and there's not much evidence of it, if any.

Anyway, on with the show, and off we march out of the village of Llansannan in a southerly direction after meeting at the bus stop in the centre of the village. We soon turn off at a farm and follow the river Aled through fields & woods and lanes eventually coming to an old mill (now house) next to a bridge. A lovely spot for a quick stop before we tackle a short, but very steep lane but once that's over there's easy lane walking until we turn off into a field, then into woods to cross a bridge and then a steady slog up to 'Katy's farm' at Cleiriach. Katy is one of our original walkers and joins when she can when her work around the farm and B&B plus chalets allows. She always makes us welcome for our coffee stop and we find it very difficult to get going again..but we do, and after a very brief stop to visit our 'wooden' pilgrim/Poet sat on a bench surveying the valley we've just hauled ourselves up, we cross the moor where we see the full extent of the mountain ranges of Snowdonia which will be in sight for most of the day (weather permitting of course).

It's now a very remote walk before we drop down into Gwytherin but a rewarding one and here we can rest and have our lunch albeit probably a late one. It's tempting to want to stop here in this pretty village with its church and pub around the village square but unfortunately the pub is more of a restaurant that's not open during the day and the church is now an artists private studio. There is however some lovely clean loos that you will be able to use. Make sure you do because there's still a long way to go. There is now a nasty steep climb out of the village but the views when you get to the top, of the Denbigh moors behind you are stunning.

Again we have moorland to cross, but the views ahead of the mountains keep you focused. Our next place of interest is Pandy Tudur which has quite a different feel to it than previous villages especially as you come over the brow of the hill you are met with the sight of quite a large Chapel. It's a bit of a complicated route through the village but once you make your way up another steep little lane its a drop down to the main Llanrwst road which is crossed with caution to go up again. After the start of the day when you were heading due south, you're now heading in a northerly direction and soon you enter the grounds of Hafodunos Hall to walk through the gardens which in their heyday must have been magnificent. Look out for another 'Pilgrim Sculpture' pointing the way to the end of the days walk (phew!) at Llangernyw. Well done all!!

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Day 5. Llangernyw to Rowen 11.7m (18km)

So after yesterdays exertions we're not exactly looking forward to today! But once we gather in St Digain's churchyard under the 4000 year old Yew tree for a photo (it has to be done, I mean how many trees are that old!!) and we chat with our fellow pilgrims from yesterday and the new ones that may have joined us just for the day, we get invigorated to walk on.

We begin by walking out of the village the same way we came into it last evening which confuses solo walkers and independent groups who are not used to the foibles of the NWPW route planners. In 100 yds or so though we turn right off the lane and up a farm track that leads up into open land and plenty of gorse bushes hopefully in full bloom. I always think they smell of coconut (Bounty bars to be precise) but they don't taste of them! We've climbed slightly so we get some rolling hill type views. Soon though we're back on the lanes and it's quite a stretch of about 3 miles but it's easy walking and we make good time until we reach Gosen where the lane intersects a road that runs from Colwyn to Nebo and caution has to be observed crossing this road as traffic though infrequent is fast. We are at the high point of the day and the views in front of you of the mountains across the Conwy valley can be magnificent.

We now drop steeply to some zig-zag bends where we turn off at the signs to the kennels which we walk through to a cacophony of barking dogs but all is peaceful once we get past to a gentler sound of ducks quacking on their pond. We walk through several farms now as we're now skirting high up the valley that leads into Eglwysbach. The river down below us is Afon Hiraethlyn and is the one that flows through the Dell in Bodnant Gardens.

We eventually arrive into Eglwysbach down a steep lane after getting some views of the River Conwy ahead of us wending its way to Conwy and the sea. This is the highlight of the day because the parishioners of St. Martin's church always support our pilgrimage by laying on tea (or coffee) and cakes (biscuits are available too), all of which are baked by these lovely, kind people. To say that they are delicious and very welcome is an understatement. All I'm going to add is that the Bakewell Tart is to die for (IMHO). We always find it hard to drag ourselves onwards for the last 3 miles or so but as we turn out of the village onto a lovely little lane by a stream we soon forget about it especially when we climb slightly and look back at the village and see it in all its splendour. We continue round toward Tal y Cafn enjoying the views of the River Conwy again. Across the bridge we go all in single file on the narrow pavement as it can be quite a busy road and then up the lane where we turn off into a field that leads to a small copse. On our inaugural pilgrimage we had all sorts of fun here with a ladder stile that had a tree branch growing over the top rung. There was no way to get over the stile and under the branch or even over the branch. Certain intrepid Pilgrims who it just so happens were carrying implements of a gardening nature, set to on the aforementioned tree appendage and after much sweat and a few tears managed to clear our way. Thank you to Chris & Duncan for your persistence and the entertainment of course.

The way was now clear to continue into Rowen over the last few fields and farms with views of the hills that we will have to climb... tomorrow.

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Day 6 Rowen to Abergwyngregin 10.75m (17.25km)

For our regular Pilgrims this is one of our special days as it visits one of the most iconic churches on the route. And for the newcomers they are always suitably impressed...but you have to work for it! After meeting in the centre of the village outside the Ty Gwyn pub we make a visit to the Seion Chapel just up the lane before we start the climb through the woods along the Coffin path to the old church at Llangelynin. It always makes me wonder how they managed to carry anything up this steep, unrelenting path yet alone coffins. But once we get there we're amazed at the beauty of the setting and appreciate the splendour of something so old that has survived and to be in use for so long. The present building dates from about the 12/13th century but there has been a religious settlement here since the 6th. We have earned a break and after a short prayer in the church, we tuck into a generous coffee break (because we've earned it!). After a quick visit to the ancient well tucked into the corner of the churchyard, we set off onto the moor under the watchful eye of Tal y fan mountain, the first of the chain of mountains known as the Carneddau.

We skirt the mountain to pick up the North Wales Coastal path which we will be sharing for the rest of the day. After a walk over the quite desolate landscape which has its own unique beauty the path drops us down to a lovely spot at a bridge over Afon Gyrach where it's nice and sheltered enough for our lunch break. We're now walking north to the hills above Penmaenmawr and when we reach 'the edge' we turn west to view the sea and the coast spying both the Orme and Anglesey (and Puffin Island of course). We now spot the Carneddau Ponies dotted around the landscape and they will be present for the rest of the day. Just off the path are the ancient Stone circles which are certainly worth a visit and afford a wonderful view being the highest point of today's walk at almost 1300ft.

No time to linger as we make our way across the moor on a good path that descends into Llanfairfechan but not into the town itself but at the top end at the Nant-y-coed nature reserve where we cross the Afon Llanfairfechan which can be a raging torrent if there's been rain in the mountains. It's OK there is a bridge.

Time to gird your loins again as there is another climb to regain the height you've just lost but the views you get are again spectacular as you make your way to the Roman Road that comes from Rowen through the Blwlch y Ddeufaen. We're really in the mountains here as we reach 1200ft. Fortunately we don't go any higher and we follow the Roman road that eventually turns into a tarmacked lane, down into Aber at to the car park at Bont Newydd where tomorrow we'll gather to walk up to the falls and the rest of the days walk.

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Day 7 Abergwyngregin to Bangor 11.65m (18.75km)

It's a nice easy start to today's walk with a gentle one mile stroll up to the falls from the car park where we spend too much time admiring the water tumbling down from a 120 ft height. I remember one year as we set off from the car park there was a downpour, and Nick, one of our group, remarked that there will be a torrent coming over the falls by the time we would reach them. However, by the time we got there and by now the rain had stopped, the falls had the usual cascade of water, but all of a sudden the flow increased by a surprising amount so much so we could hardly hear ourselves talk. It was quite exciting to witness the falls in full flow.

The experience of the falls is a fabulous start to the day but we must crack on so over the bridge we go to walk to the smaller falls farther on which have their own dramatic beauty. Leaving these we alter direction virtually going back on ourselves to slowly climb out of the valley toward the coast now getting views over Lavan sands to Puffin Island and Anglesey to the left and the Great Orme and quarries at Penmaenmawr to the right. We've actually climbed 600ft since the start but it's been so gradual and the vistas have been so engrossing, we've hardly noticed. Looking back to the falls from this high point is worth the day on its own.

We're still sharing our route with the North Wales Coastal path and we will be (more or less) all the way into Bangor. The route now stays high and it's relatively easy walking with tremendous views all round. I say relatively easy, but if the weather is inclement it can be a slog because there is no shelter here and you are at 800-900 ft until you hit the lane above Tal y Lon. We've been caught out a few times including a couple of snowstorms one of which was in the middle of a very sunny day! We try to fit in lunch before we get to the lane at the only bit of shelter by a typical (for this area) slate fence.

Suitably refreshed we descend the fields and lanes with views into the Nant Ffrancon Pass and the Glyderau Mountains, eventually passing through the grounds of the old hall at Cochwillan and getting glimpses of Penrhyn Castle below. Next we arrive at a converted old corn mill (Cochwillan Mill) that's situated on the Afon Ogwen. This is a very pretty spot and a little time out may be in order to just look at the river flowing by. We cross over the footbridge and walk up the concreted lane under the A55 to walk past the rugby grounds and club, glancing back at the mountains we've seemingly left behind.

Walking on and across the main road into Bangor we follow the main railway line through an industrial park (briefly) to pick up the course of an old disused railway that ran from the quarries at Penrhyn to the dock at Bangor (Porth Penrhyn) which we will use tomorrow but going in the opposite direction. This is a lovely end of the day walk as it's parkland all the way into Porth Penrhyn and from there it's a short walk up the High street to Bangor Cathedral and the finish of the day.

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Day 8 Bangor to Llanberis 10.8m (17.4km)

So the first week is completed and we're half-way there. Saturday morning and all seems rather quiet in the city for an early start outside the Cathedral. We continue our journey by going along Bangor High St, which is officially the longest high street in Wales. Just as well that we're doing it over 2 days! We will have walked the almost the whole length of it bar a hundred yards or so as we cut off left before Lidl's supermarket. This is a small climb that skirts the edge of Bangor Mountain (not really a mountain but a big hill). Looking back you will get views of the city and the University which is the one of the oldest in Wales, founded in 1884 and looking very impressive up on the opposite hill. The edifice is so striking that people mistake it for the Cathedral. We soon lose these views in the foliage and are soon deposited out onto the lanes that eventually lead down into the valley and across a ford at Afon Cegin to the same dismantled railway track (now a cycleway) that led us into Porth Penrhyn yesterday. But this time we are going in the opposite direction toward Tregarth and the quarries at Penrhyn.

Like yesterday, this is a lovely peaceful (flat) walk amongst the trees with only the occasional cyclist to worry about. Soon we cross under the A55 and a specially constructed bridge (for Cyclists and walkers) at Glasinfryn. Look out for the house of the railway enthusiast at this point. Before we get as far as Tregarth we leave this track going left to go right, over the bridge and into a field that leads up to a small hamlet at Pandy. Navigation can get a little tricky here but if you look out for the markers, you shouldn't go too far astray. We are making our way up to skirt Moel y Ci going through the woods that cover its lower slopes and when we leave those woods we have our lunch break with views of Anglesey across the Menai Straits. Continuing up the hill we now head south (which is our general direction for the whole day) with the village of Rhiwlas down to our right. We are walking now into a large cwm surrounded on three sides by open access hills. We're aiming for Moel Rhiwen lying in front of us and a pretty little spot under the trees where there once was a farm. Because we're climbing we take a short break here for a rest and to bask in the ambiance of the place (and the sun if it's out!). It's become a favourite stopping place for the Pilgrims over the years and I bet other pilgrims on the route have also stopped here. We go through a gate in the wall next to the farmstead and continue up through the heather to the high point of the day at over 1100 ft and magnificent views of Elidir Fawr and Snowdon. Deiniolin is the village below us now and is soon reached but only to have to climb back out of it, unfortunately steeply but not for long. It's only a small blip because as you top out at Bigil (adequately named) the fabulous views return, only nearer.

Llanberis and Llyn Padarn lay below us surrounded by the biggest mountains in Wales and there are stunning views all around. Walking toward the village of Dinorwig you can easily miss the turning at the bus stop to go down steeply to arrive at a friend and fellow pilgrims house for tea & cakes. Stuart and his wife have more often than not welcomed us into their home and because they make the best cakes, they have made themselves the highlight of the day. If we've been previously flagging then this is the motivation to keep us going. Again we get too comfortable as there is a couple of miles to go yet but thankfully it is all downhill and through the woods at Coed Dinorwig where it's always beautiful to walk through especially when the bluebells are out. Oh and look out for the goats! Soon we've descended into the

Quarry area with the miner's hospital and the Slate Museum and if you get the chance, a look into Vivian Quarry is both interesting and spectacular. The route through the woods is not really marked by the Pilgrims Way as we feel that there are many ways you can go and we think it's nice for it to be left to you. A short walk across the bridge and then the field with Dolbadarn Castle on your left framed by Snowdon is the final leg into Llanberis.

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Day 9 Llanberis to Penygroes 11.5m (18.5km)

The day begins as now seems the norm outside a church but this time in Llanberis on the High street and after a brief gathering of our spirits (we know what's in store for us with an inevitable steep climb out of the town) we set off up the street to turn off soon toward the Chapel (Capel Coch). This is an impressive building and one you can't miss and just as well as you need to turn right here and up a very steep incline and then first left and you're now on the climb out of Llanberis which takes us up to the highest point of the day (1200 ft) at the quarry at Bwlch y Groes. Thankfully it's all lane and good track walking and the views of the valley you're leaving are wonderful. You also have Snowdon on the left hand side and Llyn Padarn down below to take your mind of the slog up the mountainside. It's great if you're lucky enough to see the train on it's first run of the day wending it's way up the mountain, easily spotted by the smoke coming from it's funnel. You realise then by just how tiny the train appears, how huge Snowdon is.

Time for a breather at the top and if the weather is kind maybe a coffee. It's downhill now into Waunfawr down a tarmacked lane with views now of a completely different valley, one that runs from Caernarfon to Beddgelert in which the Welsh Mountain Railway runs through. We also see views down the Llyn to the 'Rivals' and a destination we'll be arriving at in two days time. Off to the right, the castle at Caernarfon eventually comes into view with Newborough Sands and Llanddwyn Island on Anglesey across the Menai Strait. But we must keep our concentration in case we miss our turn off the lane to cross fields to eventually emerge on the main valley road at the bridge in Waufawr. We cross this with care as the road narrows here and the traffic situation can be hazardous. There is a very nice pub here with a micro brewery and an outside seating area. You can also cross the car park and visit the railway station to have your lunch and hopefully see one of the beautifully restored trains that run on this line from Caernarfon to Ffestiniog.

But we usually press on for a later lunch at a spot higher up the hill out of the valley to get the views back, providing the weather is being kind. We take the first lane off to the right off this busy road and find a path to the left marked Y Fron and climb through a small wooded area and then to an old abandoned farmstead which is our chosen lunch stop to drink in the views below which include a different angle of Snowdon off to the right. After our all too brief sojourn we continue in an upwards direction to reach Moel Smytho thankfully not going over the top but skirting by several enclosures to our right as we make our way through the heather to a brief but welcome lane as we head onwards across the moor by the side of Moel Tryfan. The mountain looming up in front of now is Mynydd Mawr and is a huge lump of a mountain and looks from this angle like an elephant. As we track round to the right the Nantlle Ridge in all it's glory comes into view and this will be our guide rail for the rest of the day. We usually have another brief stop at a huge rock at a crossing of paths and it's a good guide on a dismal day. We continue in the direction of Y Fron passing disused slate workings to drop down to the village visiting the old school which has been recently converted into a bunkhouse with a cafe and village shop. Still on a downwards trajectory we now go through the many quarry sites dotted on the hillsides and where you can submerge yourselves in the history and ruggedness of this area. We eventually come to the village of Talysarn to pick up the river walk into Penygroes and finally to the end of a most engrossing day.

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Day 10 Penygroes to Trefor 9.5 m (15.25km)

As we gather in the car park at the lower end of Penygroes by the Police Station we're reminded that even though the day will not be as spectacular as the previous days, we will be seeing quite an unique church and we will be starting to walk the Lleyn Peninsula which will be mostly coastal walking.

We wander up the road toward the centre of the town and turn left into Snowdon St where we can pick up a stamp at the Gallery & Framing Shop (**Edit, the stamp has now been moved-see below**) After the stamp and maybe some stocking up of snacks for the day from the local shops, we continue over the by-pass at the end of the street. We have changed the route here as we found that we were walking an unnecessary loop that added almost a mile. So here we now go left and not right down small lanes with one slight diversion through a farm (to cut a corner) to turn left down to a river crossing (Afon Llyfni) by a very pretty B&B that does welcome Pilgrims (booking required)(**This is where the Penygroes stamp is now situated-see above**). This particular bridge was swept away a few years ago and has only just been repaired causing a diversion that lasted over 3 or 4 years. It's nice to have it back on the route. We walk on across the bridge into a very peaceful and pretty glade where we sometimes meet a friendly horse or two and walk to the end of this field through a carpet of bluebells (not guaranteed!) and onto a wide lane to a farm. We sometimes have a coffee break here before we continue through the farm and into open fields with views of the 'Rivals', the small mountain range that stretch to Yr Eifl (where the 'Rivals' get their name) and the sea. Passing through another farm we eventually emerge onto a lane where we turn left and continue to negotiate the lanes right and left to arrive at another farm on the right. This farm has a very scenic outlook with a stream and a bridge across it that always seems to have trimmed grass edging and pretty flowers around it. Passing across the bridge and the house to the left, we climb up the edge of the field and through a gate with a lovely view back across the fields to the sea and Anglesey beyond. Always worth at least a 5 minute break here, at least to get your breath back after the hill you've walked up. It's now the enclosed farm track we use that leads us to go through a farm and onto a lane where we turn right to walk into Clynnog Fawr passing the high point of today at 460 ft near Capel Uchaf. However, don't look too hard for it as it's been knocked down but there is a memorial in it's place and the area around is full of artefacts relating to the community here. It's a long walk down to the village of Clynnog but we are rewarded with the views over to the coast. The Church at Clynnog is spectacular inasmuch as it seems to dwarf it's surroundings but you have to see it and 'feel' it to get the full grandeur of the place. The church is mostly 16th century but there has been something in this spot since the 7th century and it's also an important stop for the Pilgrims on their way to Bardsey. The first year we visited it on our pilgrimage, Pat, one of our group went ahead to welcome us by tolling the bell (she did have experience of bell ringing!) and it was a special moment remembered by all who witnessed it. We have an extended break and a short service here led by Chris Potter or whoever else may want to do it. We also have our lunch and well repleted, continue out of the village to visit the Well a couple of hundred yards up the road.

From here unfortunately it's all road walking all the way to Trefor except for a small detour through the woods which is optional. However, at low tide, and the tide times must be checked before it's attempted, we tend to make our way down to the beach at

Bryn Yr Eryr which you can access down a lane opposite the farm at Ystymllech. Half way down the lane there is a lane/path that leads to some holiday lets and continuing through these you find a path through the trees down onto the beach with wonderful views down to Trefor and Yr Eifl. And then it's just a matter of walking down the beach to the small harbour to finish in the car park. But care must be taken on this stretch of beach as there is mud and these areas are best avoided as we found out one year when one of our group nearly got stuck. And it's horrible and smelly stuff that mud!! And that's it for another day, see you tomorrow when we attempt the hill out of Trefor.

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Day 11 Trefor to Nefyn 7.7 m (12.4km)

Today is the first of two days of just over 7 miles, the shortest days walking of the whole route barring of course the amble on Bardsey island. But we start by climbing up to Bwlch yr Eifl which is a steady but steep climb but with views to make it worth it. We start from where we left off yesterday at the Harbour to walk toward the headland thus skirting Trefor itself. This makes for an altogether prettier introduction to the day as it involves a bit of cliff walking before we turn inland to pick up the steep lane up to the Bwlch. The metalled lane soon becomes a walled track to eventually lead out onto open heath land through a gate. Even the views from here are magnificent, so after a breather and a gathering of any stragglers, we plough on using the telegraph poles and the fence as a guide to the top where we meet a quarry track to again gather our group together and have a well earned coffee and other types of sustenance. (Edit: The actual route of the Pilgrims Way is through the town and then up the steep lane to the Bwlch) We're now at just over 1100ft and just a little farther up the track is the highest point of the day. We drink in the views of the 'Rivals' and Trefor below us and of course the views back along the coast that we've walked the previous days.

Refreshed, we walk on to the crest of the hill to encounter yet more spectacular views but in the opposite direction, down the coast to Porth Nefyn, Porth Dinllaen and beyond. Down below us is the Welsh language Centre at Nant Gwrthelyn that in the past was a quarry. An alternative route takes you down to the centre where you will find a café and it is worth a look at the old settlement there if you fancy it. From there you make your way along the coast and climb back up over by Penrhyn y Glas to rejoin the main route at Pistyll. But we go straight on keeping high and keeping the views across the tops to eventually reach the small ancient church at Pistyll for our lunch break.

St Bueno's at Pistyll is an absolute little gem sitting in a small valley near the sea and is a joy to see as you breast the final hill to the small village as it just seems to appear out of nowhere. The church which again was used by the pilgrims going to Bardsey is a 16th possibly 12th century structure built on 6th century beginnings and is made more charming by always having rushes on the floor. Its other claim to fame is the actor Rupert Davies is buried here (for anyone old enough to remember the TV series Maigret). At this spot we always remember Roger's wife Meg who because she couldn't walk too well, would meet us here with their campervan. I think it was one of her favourite spots and Roger enjoyed the fact that he could get a hot, fresh cuppa with his lunch from 'Molly the campervan'.

Time to move on even though we don't particularly want to as we're enjoying the moment. We walk past the beautiful new holiday lets built on the site of the Plas Pistyll Hotel that was popular landmark in the area for years until it's fortunes dwindled and it fell into ruin. We pass this and across the fields to the main road at a blind bend where care has to be observed to negotiate the crossing to access a path back on the other side of the road by the side of a farm that eventually leads you up through some old quarry workings. This is the last little 'pull' of the day as Nefyn can be seen below and it's a gentle walk down into the town. In the past we have visited a small (man-made?) pond by the track down into town which is a pretty little oasis with a small pier out into the pond with a bench and seats. A great place to stop and finish off any coffee that's left in our flasks and to eat that last snack bar recently

discovered whilst rooting in the bottom of the rucksack. Sadly, last year we found that the 'pier' had collapsed and the area was roped off. We finish off the walk into Nefyn through a myriad of streets after passing the old church of St. Mary's, now the Maritime Museum which is worth a visit if you arrive before closing time at 4pm (Closed Tuesdays)

A short day, but a very rewarding one and another short day tomorrow to look forward to

VPW2020

Day 12 Nefyn to Tudweiliog 7.3 m (11.75km)

On paper our shortest day but if the weather is decent, a walk around the headland at Porth Dinllaen where the Lookout and the Lifeboat station is situated makes the day even better even though you are wandering back on yourself round the edges of Nefyn Golf course adding possibly a mile and a half to the days route.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves as we assemble at St David's Church in Nefyn and after a warm welcome and a few prayers from the Vicar, Richard Wood if he's available we set off down the road to soon turn onto the path above the beach with the first of the wonderful views we'll get throughout the day. Here we are looking at Porth Nefyn with it's little harbour, pretty little houses and a row of colourful beach huts.

We walk inland for a short while walking a lane to access the cliff walk all the way down to the beach at Morfa Nefyn where we decide whether we can walk to Porth Dinllaen along the beach. If the tide is in, it's definitely not recommended as there is a pinch point at a building along the beach which is impassable at high tide. If that's the case you will have to cross the car park at the top of the steps and access the road to the golf club to reach Porth Dinllaen. If however you're lucky enough to walk the beach you'll be rewarded with the views across the bay back to the 'Rivals' to eventually arrive at Ty Coch Inn just in time for it opening it's doors for a coffee or something stronger. This pub on the beach is an idyllic spot and as you can imagine is packed out in the summer months.

Suitably refreshed we continue round the headland to reach the Lifeboat Station and climbing up past it and onto the top we reach the tip of the headland and the Lookout Station for some views up and down the coast. Staying on this path requires a bit of care in places as you'll be traversing rocks with a few drops but there are easier ways round them. We now follow the path between the Golf Course and sea until the end of the course where we drop of down to an inlet at Aber Geirch. Again care must be taken going down the well worn rock path. Despite the pipeline, the area with its stream and bridge with rushes around it is nice enough to take lunch which we have done over all the years we've walked this route. (Edit: The Pilgrims Way Route does not officially visit Ty Coch and the beach or even the headland, but goes up the main road to enter the Golf Course and then left at the sign to take you across the course to Aber Geirch)

The rest of the walk is on the coast and is typical of coastal terrain as we go up to come down to go up again and that's the order of the day but enjoyable for it with the occasional beach interspersed between, but please be aware of the tides. If in doubt, keep high! There's seemingly a lot of this path before we arrive at Towyn Farm where we turn inland to get to Tudweiliog and the finish. But before we do we treat ourselves to ice creams at the shop Cwt Tatws. This services the caravan park here where you can buy ice creams, snacks etc alongside crafts, clothing and all manner of gifts. Over the years we've been walking this large building has grown out of the small cute little building that just sold snacks and Ice creams and still exists. But with benches outside we still enjoy this treat at the end (almost) of the walk.

VPW2020

Day 13 Pilgrimage Tudweiliog to Aberdaron 12.5 m (20.1km)

This is the penultimate day of the pilgrimage but the last day of any real walking and the mileage has increased for the day! But don't worry, there's no more big climbs and most of the walk is on the beautiful coast of the Llyn Peninsula (northern section). We gather at the church of St. Cwyfan's to retrace our steps from last evening across the fields to Towyn and the coast where we turn west to continue along the top of the cliffs. Most of the coastal path today is high above the beaches but that doesn't mean you have to stick to being high. We usually stay high as it gets rather exhausting and more importantly time consuming dropping down onto every beach with no guarantee of exiting the beach in a linear fashion, plus there are always the tides to be aware of.

The pace today is quite relaxed but don't be fooled as there is a long way to go as the last couple of days may have lulled you into thinking it's all over. After a mile or so of very pleasant walking we reach a small headland with a couple of bays either side of it one with a small harbour and the remains of an old house overlooking it. This is Porth Ysgaden and along with Porth Colmon and other places along this coast they played an important part in importing coal, china, leather and lime. There's also a trig point nearby which I find odd as you only really associate them with the tops of mountains. However, it's a very good spot for a group photo with it's vista of the coast spanning away back to the 'Rivals'.

We continue along the cliffs with the occasional dip into the river outlets, always looking out to sea to spot any wildlife such as seals and the many species of birds especially oystercatchers which you can hear throughout the day. Eventually we come to a beach at Penllech that you do walk on and is a favourite with our pilgrims. Here there is a choice of ways (both the Pilgrims Way). The easier way is to continue on to Porth Colmon again with it's pretty little harbour (and lunch) or you can head inland to the church at Llangwnnadr. St. Gwynhoedl is in a beautiful setting and has three naves which proves that there was a large community here once when Porth Colmon was a thriving port. Because you're cutting across the headland to reach this church there is not much addition to the mileage and it's an alternative to the coastal walking plus it's a lovely place to have lunch.

The walk on from Porth Colmon keeps to the coast for another mile or so before it turns inland to join a lane (where the alternate route from the church joins) which eventually leads to Porth O'er or Whistling Sands and the highlight of the day. We approach the sands down a grass lane to follow a small stream through a few little dunes to emerge onto this expanse of beach which we walk across to the café at the other end, accompanied by whistling as our boots strike the sand! On a hot day this beach will be crowded with quite a few holidaymakers. Hopefully there will be enough room on the terrace outside the café for our 'much looked forward to' ice creams or whatever else takes your fancy as you will feel that it's been well earned. But there is still 3 miles to go and we really don't want to leave this idyllic and hidden part of North Wales and it doesn't help that we have to start up the steep hill off the beach. However, we manage it and continue on our merry way in a now southerly direction to cut across the tip of the peninsula to the south coast of it and Aberdaron. The terrain is a mixture of fields, lanes and tracks but nothing too strenuous and eventually we arrive in Aberdaron along the river with a fanfare of trumpets and fireworks to welcome us after our journey over the last 13 days! Oh, hang on, I must

have nodded off for a second there!! But we feel ecstatic at the near completion of our journey, as we walk through the village with big grins on our faces to the church of St Hywyn's, where we will meet again tomorrow for the trip (weather permitting) to Ynys Enlli, the island of 20,000 saints!

VPW2020

Day 14 Visit to Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli)

The only walking to be done today is the short cliff top walk from Aberdaron to Porth Meudwy to pick up the ferry across to Bardsey (and back of course at the end of the day) plus any sauntering you want to do on the island itself. The day is completely up to you as it's a day for reflection, a scamper up the hill, a bit of bird watching or whatever takes your fancy.

Colin the boatman is the man who decides whether it's safe enough to go across as the waters between the headland and the island can be treacherous and as he's been doing this crossing 'forever', he knows these waters well. The ferry has to be booked in advance and there is no guarantee you will travel on the day you want. The walk across the cliffs are a lovely way to start the day but if you're not up to the climb up the steep and many steps to the top of the cliff, you can access the inlet by road. Once we're on the boat however, the excitement kicks in and after a short 20 min crossing we land on Bardsey via the slipway at Cefn Enlli next to the big scooped out shallow bay called Henllwyn where there are more seals than you can shake a stick at. Once landed Colin gives us a brief overview what birds and wildlife we'll be able to see as this is a National Nature Reserve designated in 1986. It's also a site of Special Scientific Interest. But we head off in the direction of the mountain up a track to turn right at the first split to a small café and shop run by the only occupants of the island (beside the people who come on retreat). Here we enjoy a cuppa and mull on what we can do in the allotted time Colin has given us. It's usually about 4 hours so seemingly plenty of time to get acquainted with the island. It's funny how that time flies so make sure you decide what you need to see. We usually have a bit of time to ourselves to do what we want and then gather at the chapel at a certain time.

If you decide to climb the 500 ft Mynydd Enlli you will be rewarded with stunning views of the headland and the mountains of Snowdonia in the far distance and on a really clear day you can see the whole sweep of Cardigan bay with Harlech and Barmouth off to the east. You can discover the many small bays and inlets with it's wildlife or take a walk down to the other end of the island to look at the lighthouse. As you walk up to the religious site near to the chapel there are a few buildings to visit including the old school where you can learn a bit of the history of the island when it was occupied (including the story of the King of Bardsey) and most importantly a loo which is of the compostable type tucked away in the courtyard of one of the buildings. The site of the most interest is of course are the Ruins of St. Mary's Abbey with it's 13th century tower containing a Celtic cross commemorating the 20,000 saints reputed to have been buried here.

So after our gathering at the Chapel nearby where we celebrate our pilgrimage in song and prayer we make our way back to wait for Colin to ferry us back. It's been known that if the weather is favourable and Colin has the time and the inclination, he will kindly take us to see the many seabirds nesting on the cliffs of Mynydd Enlli on the way back on the boat. With a bit of luck you'll get to see some puffins amongst the many razorbills, guillemots and fulmars. And possibly some Manx shearwaters that nest underground at the top of the mountain. The currents here can be quite dangerous and we get bumped around, so hold on tight. But it's time to sail back to the mainland and Porth Meudwy for our short walk back to Aberdaron to make our fond farewells to our fellow pilgrims and new and old friends with a cheery 'see you next year, same time, same place(s)', but hopefully next time we'll be able to do it for real!